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# Determined Contras . . .

The cutoff of CIA funds has put a crimp in the activities of U.S.-backed guerrilla groups fighting the leftist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. But it hasn't stopped them; they still have enough weapons and ammunition to survive deep inside Nicaragua.

One of the most implacable anti-Sandinista groups is Misura, the indigenous coalition of Miskito, Sumo and Rama Indians and English-speaking black Creoles. Though they are increasingly hard-pressed for cash, fuel and other essentials, Misura leaders have no plans to give up their three-year struggle.

The depth of their determination was confirmed recently by my reporter Jon Lee Anderson, who accompanied an elite 20-man team of Miskito commandos on a harrowing journey deep into Nicaragua by sea and land. Their mission was to infiltrate Sandinista-controlled territory, gather intelligence on potential targets, and wreak general sabotage and mischief behind the government lines.

The trip—over 150 miles each way in outboard motorboats through rain squalls and high seas—was an exercise in endurance. The two Boston whaler-type dories took more than 24 hours to make the trip down Nicaragua's Atlantic coast, in two grueling legs of more than 12 hours each.

The second leg was traveled at night, because the commandos had to sail past Puerto Cabezas, an important Sandinista seaport and garrison town. The raiders slipped between the lights of the city and the fleet of fishing boats lying a few miles offshore. Some of the fishing boats were equipped with guns.

Detection wasn't the only danger. One of the boats was swamped at night miles from shore and nearly went to the bottom. But most of the Indians quickly jumped overboard, leaving two comrades to bail out the boat. They won their battle with the sea; the men in the ocean climbed back into the boat, and the journey resumed.

Mechanical breakdowns constantly threatened to set the dories adrift in enemy waters. Possessing neither flashlight nor compass, the two boatmen at the tillers navigated in pitch dark from the feel of the waves. They put their trust in their own instinct and an occasional prayer to the Almighty.

At dawn, the commandos reached their secret destination: a large Miskito fishing village some miles south of Puerto Cabezas. While the boatmen took the dories away to hide for the return trip, the raiders hurried through the paths of the still-slumber-

ing village, past the outlying farms and into the swampy forest. For an hour, they slogged through rice fields and marshes, calf-deep in mud and water, till they reached a large lagoon. Then they paddled in dugout canoes to the guerrillas' camp—a noble term for what was nothing more than a single floating mangrove island dominated by one large, spreading tree, whose boughs screened the hideout from the open lagoon.

The camp consisted of hammocks and branch beds strung high up in the tree over the foul-smelling swamp water. A single tent with a floor of cut saplings served as the cookhouse and storeroom for the sacks of flour, rice and cases of ammunition.

This primitive redoubt is the Misura forces' principal "infiltration camp." The guerrillas fan out from there to hit targets along the coast and infiltrate Miskito villages, or hike inland to strike at the Sandinista military outposts near the gold fields of Bonanza, Shiuna and Rosario—a principal objective of the guerrillas.

Another prime target of the Misura guerrillas and their "Latino" counterparts is the single road that snakes through the outback between Puerto Cabezas and the heavily populated areas of western Nicaragua. In fact, one of the main responsibilities of the special force that my associate accompanied is to set up ambushes on that road.

The commandos were part of a 70-man special force known as TEA (*Tropas Especiales del Atlantico*), which graduated from an intensive five-month training course conducted by CIA contract agents at secret camps on the Honduran-Nicaraguan border.

A second infiltration group followed, taking the sea route, while a third group was making a 2½-week trek overland to its assigned area. Meanwhile, a specially selected group of about 20 Indian youths was finishing a three-month training course in psychological warfare at a secret location some 10 miles from the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa.

If nothing else, these ambitious programs demonstrate the Misura's willingness and resolve to stay the course, despite the recent cutoff of CIA funds. In fact, though, the Misura leaders seem certain that their CIA funding will be restored in two months or so.

They are counting on the CIA for air drops of supplies and ammunition when aid is resumed. Meanwhile, the guerrillas will lie low and try to stay alive in the bush as best they can.

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